



Fire Districts

Public Meetings

Moraga-Orinda Fire District Board of Directors

Wednesday, Dec. 2, 7 p.m.

Wednesday, Dec. 16, 7 p.m.

Moraga Library Community Room
1500 St. Mary's Road, Moraga
For meeting times and agendas,
visit www.mofd.org

ConFire Board of Directors

Tuesday, Dec. 8, 1:30 p.m.

Board Chamber room 107,
Administration Building,
651 Pine St., Martinez

For meeting times and agendas,
visit <http://alturl.com/5p9pu>.

Emergency response information
and training:

Lamorinda Community
Emergency Response Team (CERT)
www.lamorindacert.org.

Fire Chief Wraps His Legacy around Ambulance Contract

By Nick Marnell

Contra Costa County Fire Protection District chief Jeff Carman reflected on a painful time in the district.

"Fourteen months ago, there were people saying we can't even run a fire department," said the chief. "So how were we going to run an ambulance service?" With the unanimous approval by the Board of Supervisors Nov. 17 for the district to provide county emergency ambulance service, most of Contra Costa County is going to find out how beginning Jan. 1.

Carman joined the struggling fire district in 2013 with a mandate from his board to uncover new revenue sources. "The ambulance contract was the low-hanging fruit," he said. The contract with American Medical Response, the current county ambulance provider, ends in December, and with the possibility of additional government funds available to a public entity for emergency transport, the chief said pitching for the ambulance contract presented an opportunity he could not pass up.

"I started thinking I could do the

whole thing myself," said Carman. "But consultants convinced me it wouldn't be worth the trouble. Buying 40 ambulances, buying 40 monitors at \$35,000 each, gurneys at \$20,000 – getting all of that assembled, training a workforce, versus buying an incumbent that knew the county and how to run everything? And do the supervisors have the stomach to tell AMR goodbye? Joining with AMR was the way to go. We benefit from their incredible buying power, plus a labor force that's knowledgeable. And they're cheaper." Citygate Associates LLC, a consulting firm, concluded that the district could net nearly \$2 million in the first year of the ambulance contract.

A potential upside to the deal is that ConFire will be able to collect government reimbursement for emergency transport payable to only public entities, though the dollar amount remains unclear and was not included in financial projections. A possible downside is the future of the Affordable Care Act. "I've gotten a peek behind the curtain at AMR," said

Carman. "The depth they have in the EMS arena is incredible. I feel comfortable that nothing emanating from Capitol Hill will surprise us."

ConFire will pay AMR \$200 million to provide ambulance service over the five years of the contract. The district will dispatch the ambulances, eliminating the duplication of resources often seen on medical calls. But the chief said that the dispatch centers will not be completely merged until Feb. 1. "Moving their computer system onto ours, the costs of new hardware. Until (February), that will be the one piece missing, where we can cut down the dispatch time," said Carman.

The regions of Contra Costa County that will not be covered by the ConFire-AMR Alliance are those served by the Moraga-Orinda Fire District and the San Ramon Valley Fire Protection District, which provide their own ambulance service. The district projects that ambulance response times will decrease an average of 30 seconds under the new system.

The chief said one of the toughest

challenges of the merger was getting the new billing contractor aligned. "The AMR system has to auto-feed into the Intermedix system. But it will be done by Jan. 1," said Carman. Advanced Data Processing, Inc, a division of Intermedix, will provide billing for district emergency transport services for an \$8.5 million fee through the life of the 5-year contract.

"What makes me nervous? That so many people are watching. I get calls from Florida, Georgia, Ohio, looking at this," said Carman. Santa Clara and Alameda counties are also eyeing the ConFire business model, which is the first of its kind in California, according to county administrator David Twa. "But I'm very comfortable with the risk we're taking. Nothing really changes for the public," said the chief.

"It's a remarkable accomplishment," said Supervisor Mary Piepho.

Carman agreed that securing the ambulance contract was a career accomplishment, but he hesitated to do a bat flip just yet. "Let me get six months under my belt and then, yeah, I'll agree that this was the way to go."

MOFD Restores Salary Cut to Firefighters

By Nick Marnell

The Moraga-Orinda Fire District presented its 2014-15 Comprehensive Annual Financial Report Nov. 18, highlighting a general fund surplus of \$1.4 million. Contributing to the surplus was the 3.5 percent wage reduction agreed to by district employees. One percent of the reduction was restored July 1.

With this considerable improvement in district finances, the board agreed to restore the remaining 2.5 percent wage reduction effective Dec. 1, seven months earlier than outlined in the memorandums of understanding between MOFD and its labor groups. The motion passed 3-1, with Steve Anderson dissenting and Alex Evans absent.

"I'm pleased that we're doing this, and I'm happy that we were able

to do it," said director Fred Weil.

"This was very difficult," said fire chief Stephen Healy, commenting on the original labor negotiations that resulted in wages lost by the firefighters. "It's kind of a deep wound to them. I'm sorry this had to happen in the first place."

The directors should probably not expect a thank you card from the union. Representative Mark DeWeese blasted the original pay cut as unnecessary, and he said that the elimination of the cut leaves the firefighters with the same pay they were making seven years ago. "If you look at the data in tonight's board packet you'll see MOFD's total revenue over that same time period has grown over 25 percent," he said in a prepared statement. "Our stagnant wages and

lagging medical benefits have caused a growing recruitment and retention problem for our district, along with growing frustration among current employees."

"When we worked out that original contract, we needed help to keep MOFD running," Anderson said later. "We were on the edge. The financial situation was impacting our ability to serve our citizens and our employees."

"I don't believe in renegotiating contracts," continued Anderson. "There's no end to it when you do. These are unsettled times, with unsettled markets. We have to be financially conservative."

The district calculated the one-time cost to restore the salary reduction seven months early at \$187,000.

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Supervisor Says No to Struggling Fire District

By Nick Marnell

Supervisor Candace Andersen again refused to allocate money from the county general fund to support a special district when she voted against a \$311,000 bailout of the troubled East Contra Costa Fire Protection District Nov. 17. "When I first came on the board three years ago, we refused to give our own Contra Costa fire district the money they needed so that we would not have to close fire stations," said Andersen, whose district includes Lamorinda. "I cannot justify this one-time expense."

One of those county fire stations she referred to, Contra Costa County Fire Protection District station 16 in Lafayette, remains closed.

"I don't know that I would have supported drawing from the general fund if Lafayette had offered up additional money to keep Station 16 open or reopened," Andersen said later. The county, the fire district and the cities of Brentwood and Oakley will contribute more than \$2 million to the cost of reopening the ECCFPD Knightsen station for 18 months, a stopgap measure until the district finds a way to increase funding for its fire service.

"From my perspective, Lafayette taxpayers were already significantly

contributing toward their fire service and weren't getting sufficient value for their tax dollars," continued Andersen. "Also, at the time, I had serious concerns about how we were delivering fire service, and wasn't inclined to go to taxpayers or cities and ask for more funding until we had done all that we could to become more efficient and have a plan toward sustainability in place."

Speakers pounded the sustainability of ECCFPD as a recurrent theme. The district dropped from eight fire stations in 2008 to three today, and voters twice rejected calls for additional funding to enhance fire service. "It is not sustainable for East County to draw on our resources at the rate they are using them today," said ConFire chief Jeff Carman. "We're a system. It puts pressure on everybody, including Lafayette."

The supervisors approved the bailout 4-1, but with a list of contingencies, including that ECCFPD pursue status as an independent district, elect its own governing body and change its name. "These things should have been done eight years ago," said Supervisor Mary Piepho.

"The biggest stumbling block for me is the precedent," said Andersen,

who earlier this year rejected using general fund money to keep Doctors Medical Center, a special district, open. "We have competing needs in the county. At least one other fire district is in serious financial trouble, and I'm sure there are other districts which could use money too."

"It's a further explanation of why (the supervisors) think they have to do something in Lafayette to open station 16," said Moraga-Orinda Fire District director Fred Weil at the Nov. 18 district meeting. "If they were handing money out to East County and not reopening 16, they would have smelled the tar and seen the feathers out of Lafayette. And for good reason."

The Lafayette Emergency Services Task Force declined to comment on the county's action. "In addition to investigating detachment, we have been focused on the joint station 46, and more recently on reopening station 16. I suspect that that will be our focus until it is accomplished," said co-chair Brandt Anderson.

Carman said he plans to present a proposal for the reopening of Lafayette station 16 to his board in December.

Moraga

On-Street Parking

Traveling from Orinda to the Rheem area, Rheem Boulevard is a two-lane road, with parking stalls sometimes on one or two sides. Until recently, the street widened to create four lanes from the intersection with Moraga Road to the end of the 24 Hour Fitness and the Saint Marys' parking lot, just before 335 Rheem where the new town chamber is located. The restriping would extend the two-lane profile for

about 200 yards.

The 31 parking stalls are not the entirety of the plan. Staff was authorized to build ADA compliant curb ramps and a sidewalk, and a striped crosswalk across Rheem Boulevard. The town manager is reaching out to the Orion Academy, the school located across the street from the town chambers, to discuss the construction of pedestrian improvements on private property to continue the cross-

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walk across Rheem Boulevard and Park Street that would connect 335 Rheem to the theater, the shops, restaurants and businesses across the roadway.

Keimach says the project went out to bid. After proposals are reviewed, the concrete work will begin. The project construction manager, David Latona, can be reached at (925) 817-8091 with any questions regarding the construction operations.